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The following address was delivered by Miss Sheila McDonough, Ph.D., on the occasion of Iqbal Day commemoration in Washington, D. C., sponsored by The Iqbal Society, Inc. on April 21, 1966.

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As we are gathered here to commemorate the life and work of Muhammad Iqbal, we may perhaps honor him in the most honest way, and in the way that would have pleased him most, if we remember that he was a man with a serious purpose. Iqbal does not belong in the category of those who produce art for art's sake, or who write for the pleasure of self-discovery and self-expression. He was rather one for whom the creative process was a matter of anguish, because he wanted to communicate with other men, and because words and forms were never adequate for his purposes. He has told us of his struggles to find words. As he put it:

"Truth chokes, into words' tight garment thrust . . ." [1]

One is reminded that T. S. Eliot also complained of the heaviness, the burden laid on a poet who can never give adequate tongue to all he has to say. In Eliot's phrase:

"Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden" [2]

We have no time here to draw out all the parallels one might find between Iqbal and Eliot. Both are certainly major religious poets of this century, and both are serious men frustrated by the difficulties of language. Each felt oppressed by the weight of a vision that demands speech and form. To quote Iqbal again:

Faith is like Abraham at the stake: to be
Self-Honoring and God-drunk is faith. Hear me

The seriousness of Iqbal is a measure of the sincerity of his faith. He sees the effort to live, and in his case the struggle to write, as exemplified in the Quranic image in which Abraham is thrown into the flames as a test of his faith. As Iqbal sees it, life is always a consuming fire testing the faith of those who try to respond to the challenges of existence with courage and creative action. When

[1] The quotations from Iqbal are all taken from V. Kierman, *Poems from Iqbal*, London, John Murray.

[2] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*.

1043

Iqbal says to us—hear me—he certainly means that his writing is intended to challenge us and to strike sparks in our minds.

I have suggested that we try to approach Iqbal by focusing our attention on the poem in which he tries to tell us of the effect on him of his visit to The Mosque of Cordoba. I have used the expression "vision or perish" for two reasons. Firstly, the expression conveys briefly the effect on Iqbal by the sight of the great Mosque. The experience he had on that occasion helped crystallize in his consciousness the whole of his feeling about the problem of time—what Eliade calls the terror of history—and it also crystallized his view of the authentic Muslim answer to this terror. "Vision or perish" should give us a key to understanding what the Mosque said to Iqbal, and, therefore, it should also help us to grasp what Iqbal is passionately trying to say to us.

Secondly, the expression in its English form comes, of course, from the Book of Proverbs (29:18) namely, "where there is no vision, the people perish." For westerners trying to grasp something of the purpose of Iqbal, it is important to realize that his work has something like the flavor of the prophet Amos, or of John the Baptist. We westerners sometimes imagine that a poet of the East must somehow be soft and sentimental. Iqbal is anything but vague and misty-minded. If we are to meet him on his terms, we have to know that he is often fierce, and that his is a fierceness we should be familiar with, as it has its roots in the single-minded intensity of Semitic prophecy.

If I ask myself as a western Christian at what point Iqbal speaks most directly to me, I would answer that I hear him most clearly precisely when he lashes out at me, as for instance in his poem occasioned by the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. He wrote then:

> Those vultures of the West have yet to learn
> What poisons lurk in Abyssinia's corpse
> Woe to the shining honor of the Church

Iqbal died in 1938, but he seems to have had a pretty clear idea of the woes that were coming to birth in his time. His fierceness, as in the kind of comment quoted here, seems usually to have been well founded.

Iqbal's main effort was not directed towards bringing Christians to a more honest and constructive self-criticism, but rather towards stimulating Muslims so that they might cast off the bad habits of self-satisfaction and dreamy other-worldliness. It is because I can feel the sharpness of Iqbal's knife when he takes a cut at Christians, that I can imagine how stinging his blows must be when they are felt by Muslims whom he made the center of his efforts. When Iqbal says "hear me", he usually means that the words will hurt, but he also means that his purpose is to provoke in order to stimulate more honesty, and more creative life.

Turning now to the poem, The Mosque of Cordoba, we find a lucidity that can speak with immediacy to anyone. Nevertheless, though we can at once feel that we know what Iqbal is saying, we should recognize that his poetic language has roots in a long and glorious tradition of Urdu and Persian poetry. One can never claim to have unfolded all the possible connotations and suggestions that could be awakened by Iqbal's imagery, especially in the minds of those as familiar as he was with the Muslim literary past.

The image he uses for time—two-colored thread of silk—is an instance of one such complex image. Dr. Anne-Marie Schimmel has commented that the view of time implied here, namely—the Creator dyed time with two different colors—has parallels in ancient Iranian ideas about the ambiguity of time which seems to reward and punish man in an arbitrary fashion without reference to human efforts.[3] Similar images are found in Sufi poetry, and in pre-Islamic Arab poetry, where much reflection is done about the strangeness of life in which hunger or food, water or thirst, life or death come to man with a casualness whose source seems impenetrable.

[3] A. Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 295.

We should note that Iqbal's use of a familiar image rarely indicates a simple repetition of an old theme. Much of his genius lies in the ease with which he has used the traditional forms as vehicles for the expression of new insights. In the case of this reference to two-colored thread, Iqbal uses the old idea of the unintelligibility of the suffering and joy meted out to man by the blind and haphazard happenings in time, but he goes further and says that it is this very ambiguity of time which is precious. The ambiguity is, in his words, the touchstone by which man's works are measured. Most human efforts become ultimately futile in the face of the remorseless rolling on of time. But at a few points, man has been able to escape the destructive power of time by doing work whose perfection shines and speaks across time. As Iqbal sees it, the Mosque of Cordoba is one such instance of successful response to the test. In his words, the Mosque manifests work whose perfection is still bright with the splendor of love.

Here again, we must pause to consider the layers of meaning involved, in this case, in the word translated as "love." The Urdu word is *ishq;* this word is continually used in Iqbal's writings, and is certainly one of the keys to his world-view. Yet, just because he means so much by it, we can never feel that we have easily grasped all that he means to say when he uses it. In this same poem, he indicates something of what the word means to him.

Ishq is Gabriel's breath, *Ishq* is Mohamed's strong heart,
Ishq is the envoy of God, *Ishq* the utterance of God
Even our mortal clay, touched by Love's ecstasy, glows;
Ishq is a new-pressed wine, *Ishq* is the goblet of kings,
Ishq the priest of the shrine, *Ishq* the commander of hosts
Ishq is the warmth of life

From all this, it seems clear that *ishq* is strong, courageous power, the speech of God, the warmth of life, that gives effective vitality to everything. *Ishq* for Iqbal is the power of genuine individuality. To put it in another way, no one can do good work as

long as he is crippled by self-conscious fears for his own well being. The creative man is the self-forgetting man who is open to the reality outside of himself and responding vigorously to its challenges. In human terms, *ishq* is the opposite of crippling fear, and nervous self-consciousness.

Probably each of us, at one time or another, has had an experience in encountering a great work of art comparable to the experience of numinous wonder that Iqbal tells us he had before the Mosque of Cordoba. For Iqbal, the experience before the great Mosque had a kind of revelatory quality. He saw revealed there the vision of the ideal Muslim—"here stands his inmost self manifest in your stones." This vision helped to crystallize his conviction that whenever the members of the Muslim community had reached a high level of disciplined faith in, and openness to, the power and beauty of God, then they had been capable of magnificent creativeness in all areas. And for Iqbal the vision also conveyed the certainty that it is always possible for the community to reach the same peak of perfectly disciplined creativeness once more. When Iqbal cuts and slashes at Muslim follies, it is always because he wants the community to come alive as vividly again.

On the other hand, Iqbal's love for the Mosque of Cordoba did not lead him to any form of sterile sentimentalism about the Muslim past. He had no wish to return to the Middle Ages. Since time is so significant in his thought, he takes it as normal that an age should die, and that all kinds of radical new challenges should shake the Muslim community out of its complacency. He knows that the Christian world has been disturbed and jolted by many reforms and revolutions in the past four hundred years, and he sees the coming of similar shocks to the Muslim world as basically healthy. In his words:

Now in the soul of Islam tumults like those are astir,
Working God's secret will: tongue cannot tell what they mean.

Watch from that ocean-depth—what comes surging at last:
See how those colors change, there in that azure vault.

The phrase "God's secret will" is a key to the manner in which Iqbal looked at the historical process. The phrase has its roots in one aspect of the Quranic portrayal of God, namely that He is the Subtle. (3:54) "And God is the best of schemers."

As Iqbal sees it, the problem in looking at the historical process is to discern the finger of God at work. Once the finger is discerned, then believers should become co-workers, and co-artists co-operating with God in the process of working towards more tangible manifestations of beauty and righteousness.

I think that this idea is comparable to what the Christian theologian Paul Tillich has called "belief-ful realism." Tillich says that our troubles usually come from falling victims to the temptations of either romantic utopianism or sterile realism. Tillich maintains that the only genuinely constructive attitude is the one which grasps realistically all aspects of a given situation, which sees through the situation to the ground of hope, and which then goes on to unleash creative energy that can transform the present. Such creativeness would be a way to overcome the terror of history.

Iqbal has sometimes been accused of advocating a kind of undisciplined dynamism. It is true that when one reads Iqbal, especially in Urdu, one feels a kind of vehement urge to rush out and shake the pillars of the universe with life-affirming vigor. But to accuse Iqbal of carelessly stirring up the hearts and minds of his hearers is to fail to do justice to the seriousness of his purposes. In Iqbal's terms, the shaking is for the purpose of disciplining the faithful so that they can become sharp, knife-like blades cutting into the fogginess of life with clear and telling words and deeds. To quote him one last time:

> As is the hand of God, so the Believer's hand
> Potent, guided by craft.

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